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BLADE OF THE IMMORTAL
102
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HIROAKI SAMURA
BLADE OF THE IMMORTAL
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BLADE OF THE IMMORTAL

art and story by

HIROAKI SAMURA

translation by **DANA LEWIS**
lettering and retouch by **TOMOKO SAITO**
cover colors by **DAN JACKSON**

CAST OF CHARACTERS

MANJI
Immortal *rōnin* vowed to protect Rin and aid her in her quest for revenge

RIN
Last heir of the Mutenichi *ryū dōjō* destroyed by the Itō-*ryū*, seeks Anotsu's death

ANOTSU
The leader of the Itō *ryū* sword school targeted by the Mugai-*ryū*

GUCHI
Mugai-*ryu* assassin

MAGATSU
Formidable Itō-*ryū* swordsman

WAYAN KURISHIGE
Scarred tenacious Itō-*ryu* warrior

THE STORY SO FAR

Infected by *kessen-chu*, mystical bloodworms which can heal all wounds and grant their host immortality, Manji's bloodthirst led to the capture and murder of his sister. To atone for this and for the 100 innocent people who died at his hand while he served a corrupt lord, Manji vowed to slay 1,000 evil men in exchange for the release of death.

A surprise attack by the Mugai-*ryū* decimates a batch of new Itō-*ryu* recruits, and Anotsu rallies his surviving troops to dish out swift vengeance. Manji and Guchi are lured into a trap after Rin is kidnapped by three Itō *ryū* heavies. Making quick work of his first foe, Guchi finds himself equally matched against Magatsu, but both warriors fall into a deep chasm. Meanwhile, Wayan Kurishige severely cripples Manji using a blade doused with *kessen-satsu*, the only poison known to damage Manji's immortal blood.

designer **DEBRA BAILEY** editor **PHILIP SIMON** publisher **MIKE RICHARDSON**

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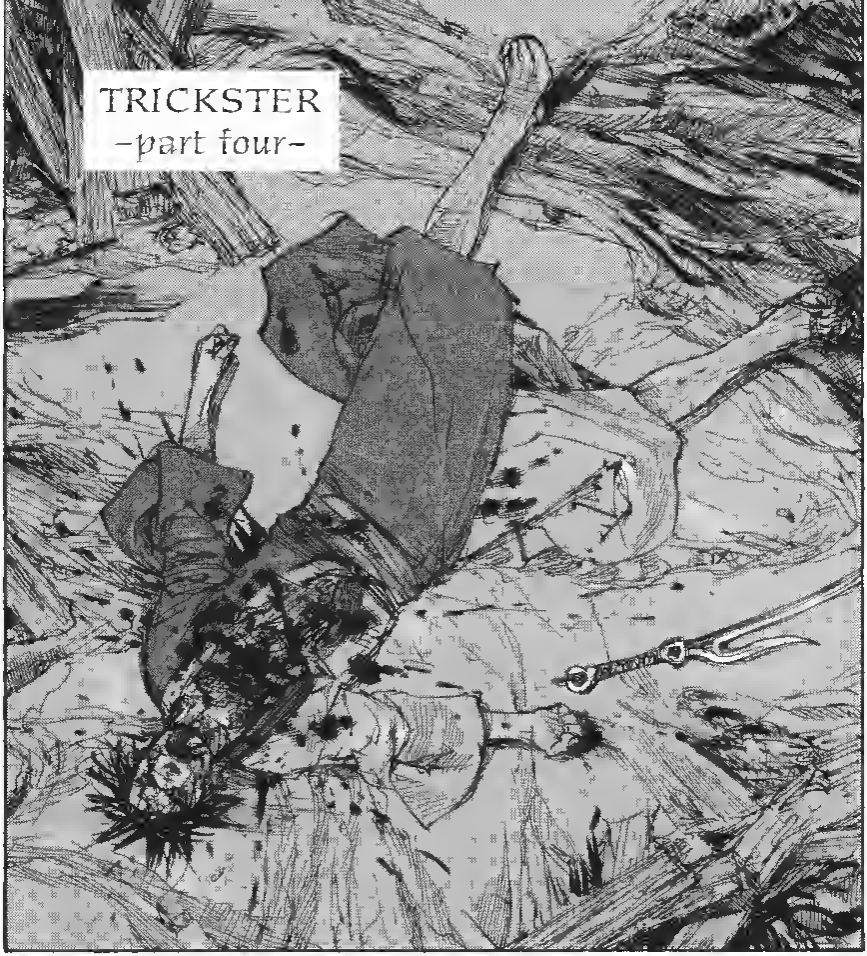
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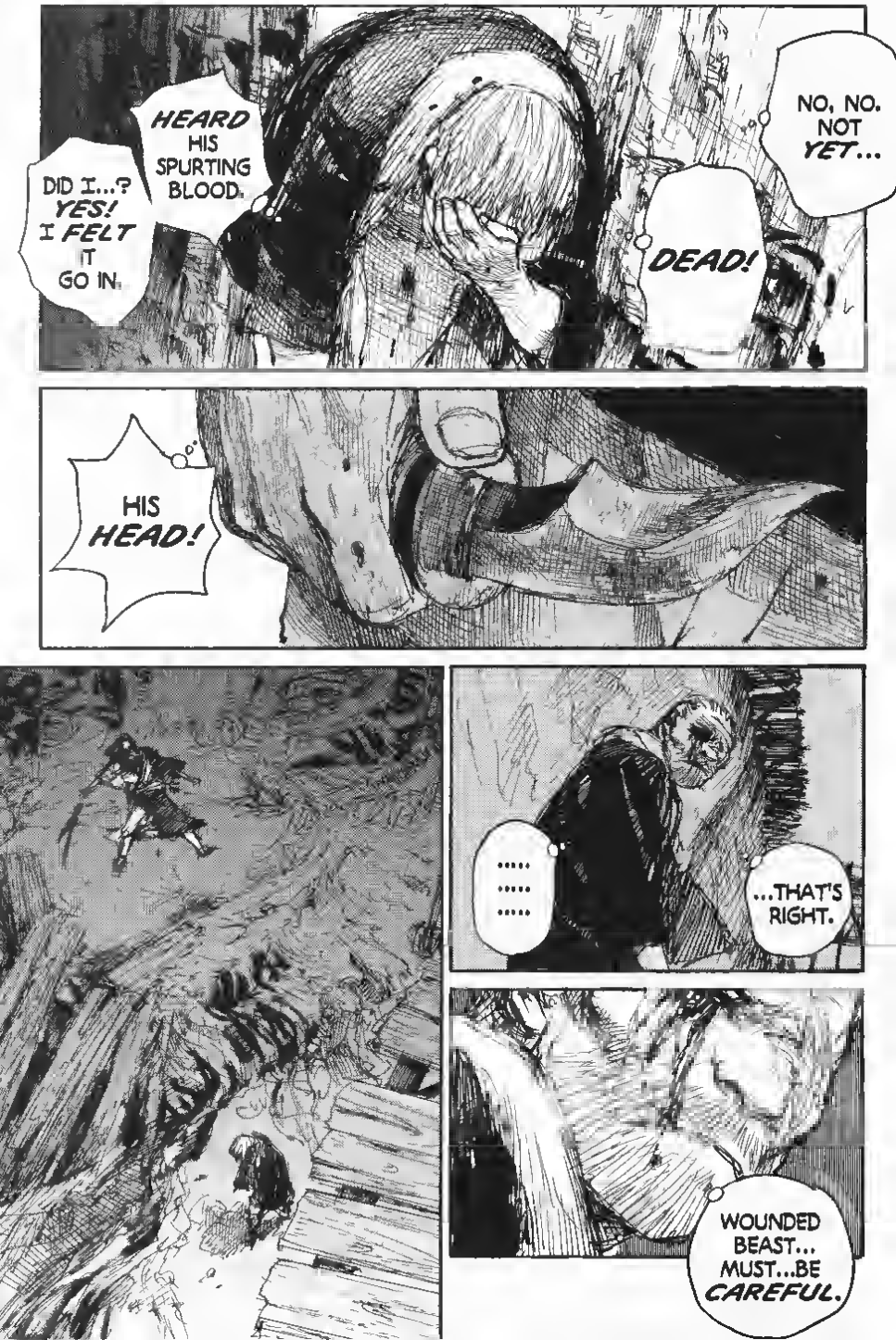
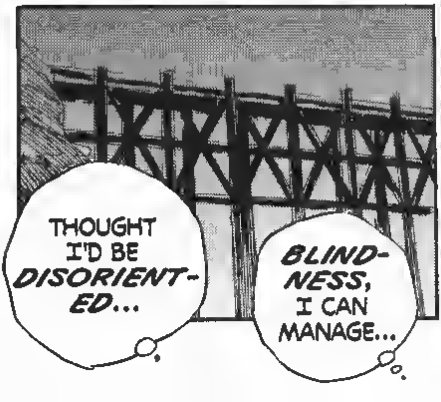
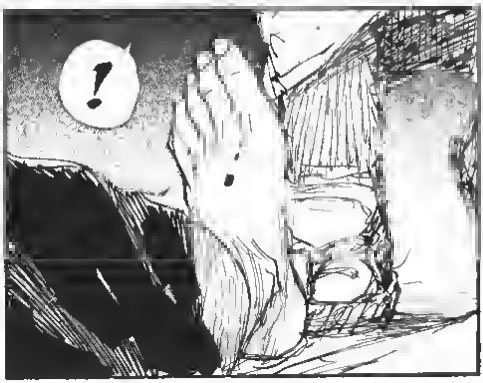

NO, NO. NOT YET...
DEAD!
HEARD HIS SPURTING BLOOD.
DID I...? YES! I FELT IT GO IN.
HIS HEAD!
.....
.....
.....
...THAT'S RIGHT.
WOUNDED BEAST... MUST...BE CAREFUL.

:ahhh:
:hff:

.....
...GOOD IT WAS NIGHT.

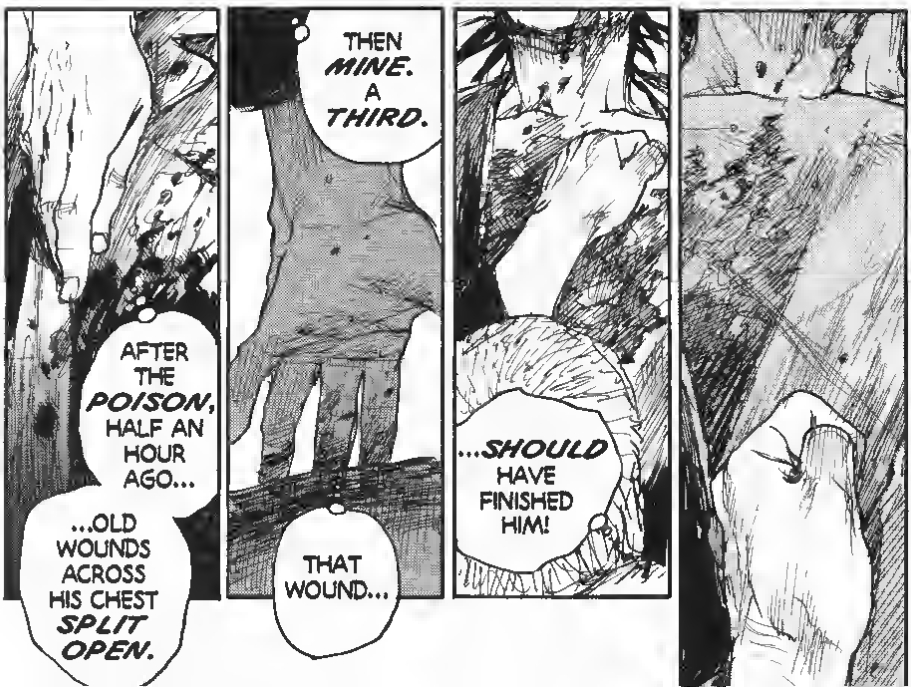

THOUGHT I'D BE DISORIENT-ED...
BLIND-NESS, I CAN MANAGE...


!

.....
.....
.....
NO MOVEMENT. NOTHING.

SO MUCH BLOOD...
THEN IT WAS HIS HEART...
...AND NOW...
...THE HEAD.
WAIT...

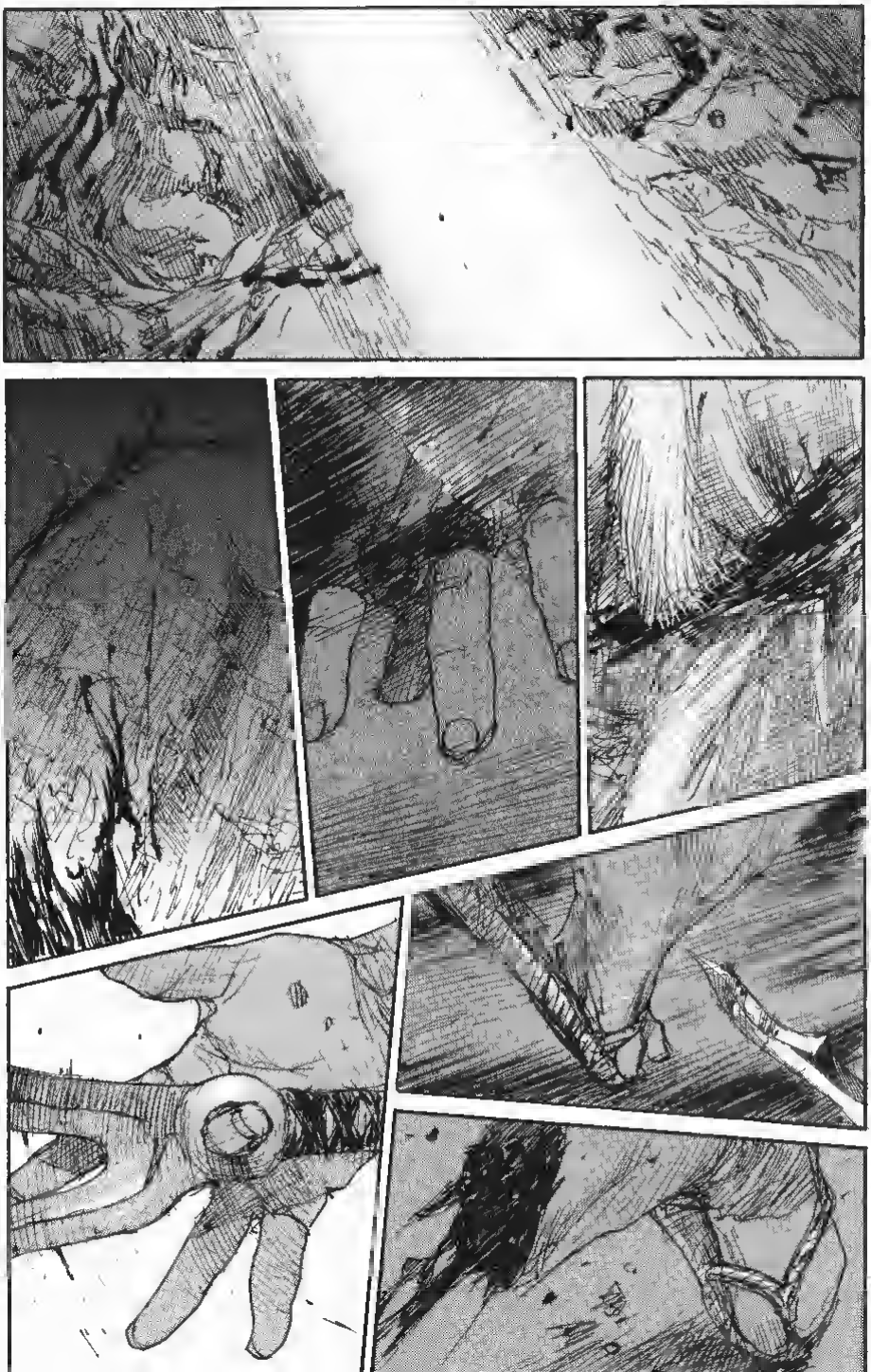
haff
hahh
haff...!
hahh
ahf


AFTER THE POISON, HALF AN HOUR AGO...
...OLD WOUNDS ACROSS HIS CHEST SPLIT OPEN.
THEN MINE. A THIRD.
THAT WOUND...
...SHOULD HAVE FINISHED HIM!

WHERE...
WHERE ARE THEY?

...GOD...
FWAPP
!
GUKK

GOTTA THANK YOU...
...WAYAN KURISHIGE.
I MEAN, DAMN.
I DIDN'T USED TO... BE LIKE THIS.
BEEN LEANING ON MY FLESH...
GOT SLOPPY... SLOPPY AT EVERY-THING.
BUT YOU PUSHED ME TO THE WALL, AND I SAW.
THANKS, MAN.



HAH...?

...GIICHI!
HEY! GET *UP*, BALDY!
...NGG...

AND THE *OTHER GUY*? YOU GOT HIM?
MANJI... IS IT--?

AHH...

HE WILL LIVE...
...EH... DEPENDING ON HOW HE HIT.
THAT'S SOME-THING...
...BEATING THAT KID.
YOU HAVE SOME TIME.
SO, GIICHI. WHAT NOW?
INTEREST-ING.
'COURSE...
WANNA FIGHT? THAT'D BE FINE BY ME.

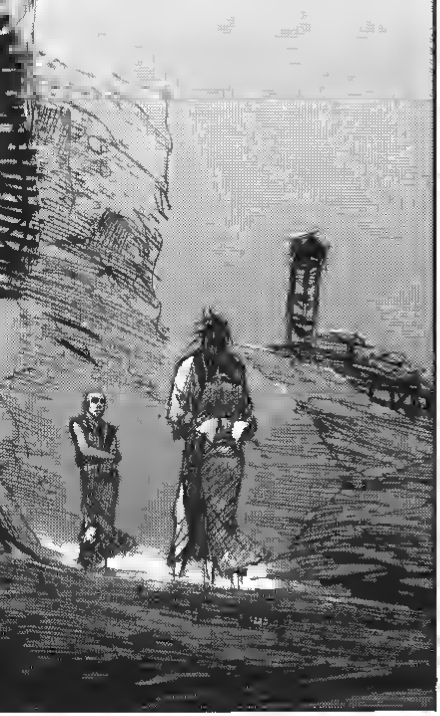
...IF YA DO, I'LL WAKE HIM UP.
THESE THINGS AIN'T FUN IF THEY'RE NOT FAIR... RIGHT?
...NO.
ENOUGH. I DIDN'T COME TO DUEL. BESIDES...
...I DON'T WISH TO DEAL WITH HIM NOW. MY RIGHT ARM IS A WRECK.
GUESS SO...
MANJI.
AHNN?

PICK OFF THE EASY ONES, AND, IN TIME, ONLY THE HARD ARE LEFT.
DON'T LOSE YOUR FOCUS.
I KNOW, MAN. I KNOW.

WAKE THE DAMN KID? MAKE HIM TELL US?
NOT MUCH OF A CHOICE
...SHIT!

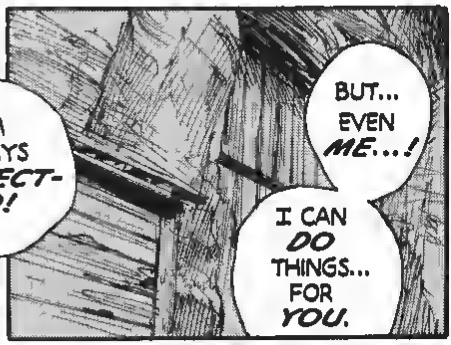
:hahh!:
:hff:
:hff:
:hahh!:

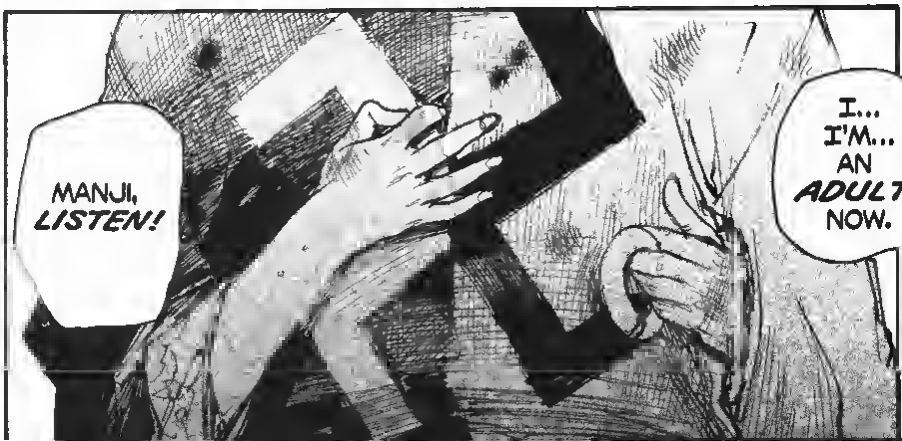
...RIN...?



DAMN, GIRL...
TO GET THAT CRAP MEDI-CINE?

MANJI...!
I'M, I'M...
I'M ALWAYS PROTECT-ED!


BUT... EVEN ME...!
I CAN DO THINGS... FOR YOU.


MANJI, LISTEN!
I... I'M... AN ADULT NOW.

IF YOU'RE GONNA DIE, I...
...I'D SACRIFICE MY ARM! EASY!
...RIN.
WHAT AM I TO YOU?
YOUR BODY-GUARD, RIGHT?
WHY THE HELL ARE YOU PROTECTING ME?!

LOOK, CRYING LIKE A BABY AN' SCREAMING HOW YOU'RE GONNA AVENGE YOUR FOLKS? THAT *PROVES* YOU'RE STILL A KID.
AND WHAT THE HELL'S WRONG WITH *THAT*?
YOU DON'T GOTTA RUSH TO TURN INTO A BITTER *HARD-CASE*, DO YA, RIN?

LETTERS

send letters to:

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www.darkhorse.com • blade@darkhorse.com

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Hyakurin by Mike Lewis, Niceville, Florida

Dear *Blade* Letters,

Sweet work on *Blade of the Immortal* #98! Nothing's better than digging out from a huge snowstorm to nestle up with a hot cocoa and the latest stack of *Mugen no Junin* comics.

It was very exciting to see the insert of *Ohikkoshi* in the back of episode #98. I bought the Japanese TPB a while back, but I can only look at the great artwork. I'd love to be able to understand the actual content! The art looks like a *Blade of the Immortal* set in the present time. Are there any plans to do a full translation? Here's to hope!

Ron Adams
Boston, Massachusetts

I am a huge fan of *Blade of the Immortal* and Hiroaki Samura, and you wanted to hear what we the fans think of a new Samura series. My feeling is that any chance you get to bring new Samura art over here to the U.S. is a must! I would support it just the same as *Blade of the Immortal*, as *BOTI*'s pretty much the only comic that I will rush out to get each month. It's much appreciated to have a book translated and brought over each month like this. Samura's line work, storytelling, and depth of character are amazing. To see a new series that's the complete opposite of *BOTI* would really be interesting and a treat. Thanks!

Mike
St. Louis, Missouri

Dear *Blade of the Immortal*,

Hiroaki Samura is one of the most talented comic artist/author combos in any country, any genre. I really appreciate Dark Horse for publishing him rather than merely a dearth of hyper-formulaic "Tokyo-poop." That you would need to ask if fans would like to see more of his work is absurd; frankly, I'd buy anything with his name on it without a second thought. Please publish this *Ohikkoshi* story. Thank you.

Z.J. Simon
via email

Dear Dark Horse,

I picked up Hiroaki Samura's *Blade of the Immortal* #98. At the back there was a panel collage of Samura's *Ohikkoshi* series along with the "Interested?" remark. I am a huge fan of *Blade of the Immortal*, and I pick up your monthly chapters as well as the volumes. I would love to see you guys do *Ohikkoshi*, and I don't see how

Manji by Cameron Brett, Sydney, Australia

Manji and Rin tattoo on Danny Ott's arm currently in Salt Lake City Utah

anyone that is a fan of *BOTI* could resist purchasing it The content is surely different and I believe that it will appeal not only to fans of *BOTI* but also to an older demographic

Anyways really hope you guys do pick it up I look forward to your *Hellsing* releases all the time and *Trigun* as well Cheers!

Daniel Chow
via email

An English-language edition of *Ohikkoshi* is closer and closer to becoming a reality The Japanese collection, published by Kodansha in 2002, is flat-out *gorgeous*, as some of you already know both in production value and Samura's page-to-page artistic energy Thanks to everyone for writing! You can be sure that we'll share any additional *Ohikkoshi* art that we get in and we're trying our best to make an English-language version happen

Dear Hiroaki Samura

I am a huge fan of *Blade of the Immortal*, and I hope the next few

Magatsu by Sergio Hernandez Chula Vista California

issues have as much great action and swordplay with Manji as can be possibly put in the comic I also love how you added Rin to the mix and how she is learning to become a great swordswoman thanks to Manji s training and her own skills and experiences.

Jamie Hicks
Springfield, Virginia

Rin's decision to travel through Kaga alone to hunt down Anatsu (way back in *Blade of the Immortal* #44) put her in some harsh situations, both physically and mentally. She's changed a lot since Yaobikuni first painted her in Manji's direction, but, as you can see in this issue, she still lets her raw emotions overwhelm her. That could wind up being either her saving grace or her tragic flaw.

To the staff of *Blade of the Immortal*,

First of all, I'd like to congratulate all of you for helping the *Blade of the Immortal* saga reach this milestone achievement. Very few comics series these days last to a hundred issues, and I am very thankful Mr. Hiroaki Samura and the entire staff of Dark Horse Comics have so much passion in keeping the series up and running.

I've been collecting comics since high school. I got started when a close friend of mine introduced me to *Spider-Man* and the *X-Men*. He would let me read his treasured collections during our free time, and from that moment I decided to become a collector myself. I saw that the comic book world had so many characters and stories that were wonderful and fascinating. I wanted my collection to be different from my friend's, so I searched for titles that were very foreign to my friend's taste, and that's how *Blade of the Immortal* came into play.

The first time I saw the series was in an article in *Wizard* magazine wherein they were introducing titles that would help newbie collectors like myself get started. I got into *Blade of the Immortal* during the "Cry of the Worm" saga and, suffice to say, I got hooked and wanted more. Out of all the comics that I read, *Blade of the Immortal* was in a league of its own. The art was in black & white but it conveyed emotion and energy. Even if the pages lacked color, the visuals made you more than just see what was going on; it made you feel it. Story-wise, it was straightforward, pure and simple. The characters lived in a time where honor and conduct were truly a way of life. To stray far from such codes of conduct and morals resulted in not only social detachment but also a spiritual and emotional death, as explored by Manji and company.

As I look at my collection of comics, *Blade of the Immortal* is the only series that withstood the test of time ... and it's still going! And as I marvel at my collection, I think about all the reasons why I held onto this series. Could it be because I got so attached to Manji and Rin that I wanted to know how things would work out for them? Or is it because I wanted to see if Anotsu would get what's coming to him? Or maybe it's because I wanted to see if Manji would fulfill his bargain and win back his mortality?

Whatever the reason is, I'm sure that all the other readers of *Blade of the Immortal* would agree with me on one thing about this series: it is simply PERFECT. Kinetic artwork and characters that you can relate and connect to. Perfect combination. What's not to like?

So once again, I bid you good fellows of Dark Horse Comics CHEERS! Thanks for a wonderful series, keep up the good work, and more horse power to you guys.

Paolo M. Zaide
Quezon City, Philippines

What a great way to cap off a nice batch of letters, Paola! Thanks very much to everyone who drew, typed, and scribbled in, and please continue to send your letters and images to us (at least 300 dpi for digital ones). Let us know what you thought of our *BOTI* #100 celebration issue and Hiroaki Samura's "Trickster" story arc. David Bird, comics scribe for *Paperback Reader* online, wrote a really nice overview of Samura's *Blade of the Immortal* series. Thanks for being a monthly reader, David!! You can read his article at http://www.paperbackreader.com/columns/why-arent/041305_why-read.htm.

Elsewhere in this issue, you'll find Jhamar Soriano's second "Rumble To Kaga" strip. We'll feature a Glichi strip in *BOTI* #103. Salutations to Mr. Soriano for his feracíously funny *Blade* paradies ... and to Mr. Lucius Romero, who shared another fantastic pinup image with us (you can find more of his artwork at the aptly named *www.luciusromero.com* website). Our next handful of *Blade of the Immortal* installments will be one-shot issues, revisiting familiar characters and introducing some exciting, new ones, before settling into a disturbing, longer story arc. See you next month, when Hiroaki Samura gives us a history lesson, some poetry, and another bloody match in the *Ittō-ryū* versus *Mugai-ryū* feud!

–Philip Simon

Mini Simon by Pop Mhan

NEXT MONTH:
Pity

A poignant one shot episode dealing with the complex relationships of compassion honor and revenge in the vicious landscape of Hiroaki Samura's samurai-punk epic. Abayama an older *Itto-ryū* leader who has seen his share of death and violence stumbles into a surprising predicament.

GLOSSARY

dojo a school for combat and self-defense training in martial arts, here, a training center for swordsmanship

Itto ryu the radical sword school of Anotsu Kagehisa

kessen-chu The "sacred bloodworms." A person infected by them cannot die but feels pain like a mortal

kessen-satsu "Bloodworm killer." A poison used to counteract the *kessen-chu*

Mugai-ryu criminals working as assassins for the Shogunate earning their freedom by killing assigned targets

ryu a sword school

ABOUT THE SWASTIKA

The main character in *Blade of the Immortal*, Manji, has taken the "crux gammata" as both his name and his personal symbol. This symbol is also known as the *swastika* a name derived from the Sanskrit *svastika* (meaning "welfare," from *su* — "well" + *asti* — "he is") As a symbol of prosperity and good fortune the *swastika* was widely used throughout the ancient world (for example appearing often on Mesopotamian coinage), including North and South America and has been used in Japan as a symbol of Buddhism since ancient times. To be precise the symbol generally used by Japanese Buddhists is the *sauvastika* which moves in a counterclockwise direction and is called the *manji* in Japanese. The *sauvastika* generally stands for night and often for magical practices. The *swastika* whose arms point in a clockwise direction is generally considered a solar symbol. It was this version (the *hakenkreuz*) that was perverted by the Nazis. It is important that readers understand that the *swastika* has ancient and honorable origins, and it is those that apply to this story, which takes place in the 18th century (ca. 1782-3). *There is no anti-Semitic or pro Nazi meaning behind the use of the symbol in this story. Those meanings did not exist until after 1910*

ABOUT THE TRANSLATION

The Artwork. The author of *Blade of the Immortal* requested that we make an effort to avoid mirror-imaging his artwork. Some manga are first copied in a mirror image in order to facilitate the left-to-right reading of the pages. However, Mr. Samura decided that he would rather see his pages reversed via the technique of cutting up the panels and repasting them in reverse order. While we feel that this often leads to problems in panel-to-panel continuity, we place primary importance on the wishes of the creator. Therefore, most of *Blade of the Immortal* has been produced using the "cut and paste" technique. There are, of course, some sequences where it was impossible to do this, and mirror-imaged panels or pages were used instead.

The Sound Effects & Dialogue. Since some of Mr. Samura's sound effects are integral parts of the artwork, the decision was made to leave those in their original Japanese. When it was crucial to the understanding of the panel that the sound effect be in English, however, Mr. Samura chose to redraw the panel. We hope readers will view the un-retouched sound effects as essential portions of Mr. Samura's extraordinary artwork. In addition, Mr. Samura's treatment of dialogue is quite different from that featured in average samurai manga and is considered to be one of the things that has made *Blade* such a huge hit in Japan. Mr. Samura has mixed a variety of linguistic styles in this fantasy story, where some characters speak in the mannered style of old Japan, while others speak as if they were street corner punks from a bad area of modern-day Tokyo. The anachronistic slang used by some of the characters in the English translation reflects the unusual mix of speech patterns from the original Japanese text.

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Manji!
Pinup by Lucius Romero Colorado Springs Colorado

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